

Final master plan set for approval

■ Council to OK plan that permits limited growth and protects the environment

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The Montgomery County Council is scheduled to approve a new master plan for Damascus Thursday that will closely resemble the vision for the future laid out by the community during more than three years of meetings.

CONTINUED

MASTER PLAN

"Damascus is a small town surrounded by the agricultural and rural open spaces of the county's Agricultural Reserve," the proposed plan states.

It aims to establish a town center easily identified as the heart of the town by creating a moderately intense mix of uses, increasing the number of people living there and using design and scale to create the desired goals.

Proposed zoning would allow up to 1,700 new homes in the town center and up to 1.6 million square feet of additional commercial uses.

The Damascus Master Plan will create a vision for the community for the next 20 years in the areas of environment, transportation and housing.

Damascus is located at the northwest tip of Montgomery County. Councilmembers have said Damascus is not a "smart growth" area because it lacks a good transportation network and is relatively isolated from employment.

The proposed master plan attempts "to create livable neighborhoods clustered near the town center, cluster development to provide a stronger community edge, use transfer development rights to provide additional growth potential and provide a range of housing types and lot sizes within neighborhoods."

Several property owners or their representatives wrote last-minute appeals to the council asking it to approve more development on particular parcels in the

transition area between the town center and the Agricultural Reserve.

By straw vote in March the council approved extending water and sewer service and allowing additional development only in those areas where it did not think the added density would be harmful to the environment. Parts of Damascus are environmentally sensitive and contain high quality forests and wetlands. The community is the source of four major watersheds.

"This plan recommends that careful attention be given at the time of subdivision or site plan to proposed new residential development that adjoins existing single-family residential development, ensuring compatibility of scale, height and proportion," the plan states.

The council is expected to add language to protect against special exception zoning being used to alter the intent of the plan.

"This town is set on a hill, and the long vistas outside the town center provide the most distinctively visual element for the community," the plan states. "Land uses that impede those vistas should be discouraged."

Council members noted the large number of churches in Damascus and added language on their importance to the community. "This plan supports the continuing stability of major institutional uses, such as churches and schools, that are an intrinsic part of the character of Damascus."

It addresses one church's immediate problem by recommending a planned park-and-ride

COMING UP

The County Council is scheduled to vote on the Damascus Master Plan Thursday at 10:15 a.m. at the Council Office Building, 100 Maryland Ave., Rockville.

lot be built close to the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer on Woodfield Road so the church can use the lot for parking after it loses part of its parking area to Woodfield Road extended.

The master plan will also settle once and for all the question of a Damascus bypass. By straw vote on May 18 the council approved removing any further consideration of a bypass to relieve congestion.

Instead the council will ask the State Highway Administration to lead a multi-jurisdictional study of road and transit options for traffic from Carroll, Frederick and Howard counties that clogs Damascus roads.

The plans' "goal is to improve the efficiency of the [two-lane] roadway network, provide road improvements, expand the pedestrian and bicycle path networks and improve the potential for intercepting commuters through expanded transit options."

The plan recommends using street design and traffic-calming devices to encourage slower speeds through the town center to make it safer for pedestrians and cyclists.

The council will also vote on zoning amendments to implement the plan.